

ASPIRA Celebrates 35th Anniversary With First National Conference

In May, ASPIRA proudly hosted its first national conference in honor of its 35 years of dedication to the education and leadership development of Latino youth. Over four hundred people attended the conference *Latinus As a Critical Voice: Preparing Tomorrow's Leaders* at the Omni Shoreham Hotel in Washington, D.C.

Over 100 Aspirantes from across the United States and Puerto Rico came together with a diverse group of nationally recognized policy-makers, educators, parents, community leaders, health professionals, and education practitioners. Participants reviewed the condition of the education of Latinos and had the opportunity to participate in over 25 panels and workshops on topics as diverse as parental involvement, public policy, funding and youth leadership, and set forth specific strategies to further develop Latino leadership for the next century.

Ronald Blackburn -Moreno, National Executive Director opened the conference at a reception and awards ceremony.

Dr. Nancy Cole, President of the Educational Testing Service (ETS), a major sponsor of the conference, offered the keynote address for the evening entitled, "The Status of Education and the Education of Latino Youth." ASPIRA presented an award to ETS for advancing the organizational growth and development of ASPIRA.

Dr. Clay Simpson, Assistant Secretary for Minority Health, received an award presented to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services for advancing ASPIRA's organizational growth and development in promoting the health professions. U.S. Senator Paul Simon (Illinois) offered encouraging remarks on "National Education Policy: The Future Role in Education and Its Implications for the Education of Hispanics," and called on today's Latino youth to study hard now so they may serve society in the future. He noted that Hispanics are the largest growing ethnic group in the nation and must be prepared to meet the challenges presented by the use of high technology and a more global economy.



Secretary Richard Riley addresses ASPIRA Conference Participants

The conference also featured an Awards Gala and Dinner, hosted by Mr. Gil Pimentel, Producer of ABC News.

Richard W. Riley, Secretary of Education, U.S. Department of Education, made a moving keynote address about the plight and successes of Hispanic students in America and the need to thwart proposed cuts to the federal education budget before the U.S. Congress. Humorously referring to a picture of his crying infant granddaughter, Mr. Riley chuckled, "she must have seen the federal budget proposal."

Mr. Jaime Santana, Chairperson of the ASPIRA National Board presented an award to the founders of ASPIRA on behalf of ASPIRA and thousands of Aspirantes across the U.S. and Puerto Rico. Dr. Antonia Pantoja accepted the award on behalf of ASPIRA's founders. Dr. Pantoja's remarks came via video, allowing the dinner guests to observe her tell of her experience about coming to the U.S. mainland, and describing her role as founder of the organization. A new video on ASPIRA, developed by ETS, was also presented.

ASPIRA also recognized The Ford Foundation for advancing ASPIRA's organizational growth and development. Dr. Janice Petrovich, Program Officer at the Ford Foundation, accepted the award on behalf of the Foundation.

Entertainment was provided by *El Gran Combo de Puerto Rico*. The Conference and Gala were sponsored by the Educational Testing Service and the following corporations: Ford Motor Company, Coors Brewing, Toyota Motor Sales U.S.A., Kraft, Coca Cola, Anheuser-Busch, Time Warner, Inc., PepsiCo, United Parcel Service, Denny's, and the General Electric Foundation. A full insert on the National Conference will be included in the next newsletter.



Director's Corner

The ASPIRA Movement 35 Years



This is a very special year for ASPIRA. We proudly celebrate 35 years of service to the Puerto Rican and Latino community, and as part of our celebration we hosted our highly successful first National Conference in May in Washington, DC.

The ASPIRA National Conference was no less an expression of our extraordinary successes of the past as it was a reflection of our vision of the future. Since our beginnings in New York City in 1961 with our first counseling program, our first cultural events, and our first ASPIRA Club, ASPIRA has turned into a major force in education and leadership development of our young people. Today, tens of thousands of Puerto Rican and other Latino students walk through our doors each year in six states, from Illinois to Puerto Rico. We operate alternative schools, large community service

programs, health education and promotion initiatives, local and national internships, educational enrichment, counseling and GED programs, and significant parental involvement programs—all to improve education for our young people, to develop leaders and to bring about change. Most importantly, we continue to expand our core—the ASPIRA Clubs. We have become a nationally-recognized and effective advocate for education, and we have developed a solid organizational base that will ensure our stability well into the next century.

Our National Conference provided additional national visibility to ASPIRA, and showed that ASPIRA has become a leader among national Latino organizations. The quality of the conference was extraordinary. Keynote addresses—which included Secretary of Education Richard Riley, Nancy Cole of ETS, David Hornbeck from Philadelphia and Senator Paul Simon—as well as of the panels and workshops, where we had over 150 experts in a variety of areas in education, philanthropy, community organizing and business.

ASPIRA has certainly had its share of ups and downs over the years. However, we have come out stronger after every challenge. I have seen many organizations and many good-intentioned and committed people who haven't fared as well, which makes me ask: why has the ASPIRA movement been so successful? Where does ASPIRA's power come from?

ASPIRA's success, of course, is closely related to the lack of success of the Puerto Rican and Latino community over the last 35 years in tearing down the walls that bar us from any kind of equity in this country. Puerto Ricans, and Latinos generally, are not much better off than they were 35 years ago: urban poverty, poor schools, lack of overall educational access, dependency, and rejection, are as bad today as they were then if not worse. Many of our children are suffering just as much. We are still struggling to get a decent education for our children and to have the same opportunity as others to develop our community. But our success is also related closely to the vision, thoughtfulness and leadership of those who started ASPIRA 35 years ago and of those who, over the years, have refined our way of serving our youth. They developed the most comprehensive and effective leadership development framework for our youth. The mission they developed, we reaffirm 35 years later and is still what drives us. The ASPIRA Process, our method of developing self-confidence, leadership and pride in our heritage among our youth, is still at the core of our work. The ASPIRA Clubs

remain the foundation of our youth-centered organization. And, our commitment to the Puerto Rican community is stronger than ever.

For its 35 years, ASPIRA has been much more than an organization. Ask any ASPIRANTE. It has been a movement, a movement within the Puerto Rican community in our struggle to overcome economic dependence and social discrimination. Our National Conference was a true expression of this movement.

To those who have built this movement, my personal congratulations on ASPIRA's 35th anniversary. To our friends and supporters, our thanks. To those who will follow us, may their commitment be as unwavering as those who preceded you. To our ASPIRANTES - Adelante.



U.S. Senator Paul Simon (D-Illinois) speaks before the ASPIRA Conference



In Brief

News from Around the Association

ASPIRA of Connecticut inaugurated its new building. Dr. Antonia Pantoja and César Batalla, Chairman, ASPIRA of Connecticut cut the ribbon to officially open the building. Mr. Joseph Ganim, Mayor of Bridgeport, addressed the audience of over 60 people, including other prominent civic leaders, elected officials and business representatives. Approximately 400 people attended an opening day reception and *Avevto* Ceremony.

"This is a great moment for ASPIRA of Connecticut. It is wonderful that the 'baby' of the ASPIRA family already has a wonderful facility," commented Dr. Pantoja. A bust of Dr. Pantoja was unveiled by sculptor Willie Rodriguez.

ASPIRA of Connecticut AmeriCorps members are serving at the Luis Muñoz Marin Middle School, Harding High School and Columbus School. They recently participated in a training conducted by the ASPIRA National Office on the ASPIRA Public Policy Leadership Program, which they expect to soon integrate into the high school program.

ASPIRA of Florida held its annual ASPIRA Club Federation Congressional Convention on December 18, 1995 at Florida International University. Members from twenty-seven ASPIRA clubs participated in career awareness and college preparation workshops... The U.S. Department of Justice has earmarked \$50,000 to ASPIRA of Florida for Pathways to Success, an after school program in rural south Dade County. Funding will cover expenses for a mural project, sports activities, a folkloric dance troupe and a career club. The Florida Governor's Drug

Free Grant will award \$50,000 for drug prevention programs in Homestead Middle School, Leisure City Elementary and the outreach clubs in the Redlands and South Dade labor camps... Local businesses and organizations joined ASPIRA in uniting the community to Increase the Peace on February 5.



Aspirantes from Chicago, IL, in the audience at the Youth Conference on Violence

ASPIRA of Illinois moved to a new, larger facility. The new facility allows the Alternative High School, counseling offices and administrative offices to be at the same location. The new facility contains a large multi-purpose room that enables students to hold meetings or cultural events such as this year's "Bombass" by the Alternative High School on December 21, and their celebration of El Dia De Los Reyes January 6. ASPIRA held an Open House on October 25, 1995 which was attended by community organizers, politicians, parents, and students... On October 29, ASPIRA held its First Youth Conference on Violence. Over 200 students attended the event. Guest speaker Luis Rodriguez, author of *Always Running* -

Esta Vida Loca, spoke about violence within our communities and on his experiences visiting youth who have been imprisoned for acts of violence.

ASPIRA of New Jersey ASPIRA / AmeriCorps Members are working in the Rafael Hernandez High School, Luis Muñoz Marin Middle School and Project Focus Alternative High School. The New Jersey Corps anticipates participation in a training on a new reading curriculum for students participating in ASPIRA / AmeriCorps activities. The training and the curriculum, entitled "Time to Read," will be provided by Time Warner.

Funding for ASPIRA of New York's Beacon community centers was extended. ASPIRA has forged a strong relationship with East Side House, Inc., to carry out recreational programs and also made linkage agreements with co-locators to provide family and health support services... ASPIRA of New York hopes to receive funds to establish a middle and high school in Community School District 18. The main themes of this school will be public policy, dual language instruction, multiculturalism, and community involvement... ASPIRA of New York has been active in advocacy on bilingual education and co-sponsored the Bilingual Education Conference at Hostos Community College... ASPIRA of New York continues its efforts to building the ASPIRA Alumni Association. (continued on next page)



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ASPIRA of Pennsylvania ASPIRA / AmeriCorps is coordinating services in two high schools, Edison and Kensington, and two middle schools, Julia de Burgos and Roberto Clemente. They are coordinating a number of special activities, including the ASPIRA Leadership Conference and the 2nd Annual Soup Kitchen... ASPIRA of Pennsylvania held an open house for their new program, 21st Century ASPIRA/Edison Community School/Adult Education Project. The project's goal is to establish a community learning center. The center will concentrate primarily on adult education, and vocational counseling and training leading to community economic revitalization and empowerment. There are currently 150 participants in the program... ASPIRA held its Fourth Annual Three Kings Day Benefit Gala on January 5, at the Wyndham Hotel in Philadelphia featuring the entertainment of Willie Colón and Trina Medina. Approximately 1,200 Latinos attended... The "Abriendo Caminos Program" (GED) recently graduated 70 students in its annual graduation ceremony.

ASPIRA de Puerto Rico celebrated its 25th Anniversary with a gala dinner and dance at the Hyatt Cerromar in Dorado, Puerto Rico. Over 500 Aspirantes and local dignitaries attended the black-tie event, which featured award-winning actor and *Aspirante* Jimmy Smits (see insert) as an awardee, as well as local talent, Nydia Caro, a well-known entertainer who served as mistress of ceremonies for the event. ASPIRA de Puerto Rico honored ten Aspirantes who have become highly successful in their fields, including medicine, education and journalism. An awards ceremony was followed by a dance and *Los Hispanos* review.

Has ASPIRA ever "touched" your life? Or do you know someone whose life may have been touched by ASPIRA? If so, please let us know by writing to ASPIRA News in the ASPIRA National Office today! We'd like to publicize your stories.



Manny Rivera, AmeriCorps Member,
ASPIRA of Connecticut

Dr. Antonia Pantoja, Founder of ASPIRA Receives Awards

La Casa Cultural Julia de Burgos at Yale University selected Dr. Antonia Pantoja, Founder of ASPIRA, to be a recipient of its third Annual Julia de Burgos Award. Julia de Burgos (1914-1953) is recognized as one of Puerto Rico's greatest poets. The award has been established to recognize outstanding achievements and contributions in academia, art, history, culture or civic activity that enhance people's insight about themselves and the human condition or creates meaningful opportunities for self-determination and community-building. Dr. Pantoja also recently received the annual lifetime award for education from the National Hispanic Leadership Conference in Chicago during their annual event attended by over 2,000 Latinos from across the country. A video highlighting Dr. Pantoja's accomplishments in education and community development over the last forty years was also produced.



ASPIRA of Connecticut Opens New Building:
L-R: Ronald Blackburn-Moreno, National Executive
Director, ASPIRA of Connecticut Co-Chairman, Willie
Matos and César Batalla, Dr. Antonia Pantoja and Alena
Maya, Executive Director

Aspirantes: Where are they now?

Jimmy Smits

by Elizabeth Weiser

*It's always a joy at ASPIRA to meet successful and community-oriented adults who come up to say: "ASPIRA helped me get where I am today." Last spring it happened at a White House reception for the critically-acclaimed film *Mi Familia*, and to our surprise the Aspirante was Emmy-award winning actor Jimmy Smits. He was interviewed during his recent service as keynote speaker for ASPIRA of Puerto Rico's silver anniversary gala.*

"There was an energy in the ASPIRA office and a sense of power that I needed in order to keep on. It was the sense that this office was for us, and we weren't alone." That is how Smits remembers his visits to ASPIRA of New York in the early 1970's.

"I was studying at Brooklyn College," Smits explained. "Richie Perez, my professor for Puerto Rican studies, took us down to the ASPIRA office on 14th Street to apply for a stipend program they had to pay for books. I was in the office several times that year. The stipend helped, of course, but the great thing for me was to see all these Puerto Rican young people from the same background as me, with the same aspirations as me to go to college.

"Brooklyn College had only had open admissions for a few years and there weren't too many minorities on campus. ASPIRA and the kind of progressive thinking it was a part of helped me know I wasn't alone."

Smits has built on the energy of those days to become a respected actor whose star is still rising. While he appears on television, stage, and screen, the bulk of his time currently is devoted to his starring role in ABC's top-rated *NYPD Blue*. His portrayal of Detective Bobby Simone has garnered him not only press accolades as one of television's hottest stars, but also his seventh Emmy award nomination for the quality of his work.

He has worked on a number of television movies, including December's *NAME NEW ONE* and *The Cisco Kid* with Cheech Marin. Feature film credits include *The Old Gringo* with Gregory Peck and Jane Fonda, and last year's *Mi Familia*, where he was acclaimed for his portrayal of a struggling young man in the generational story of a Mexican-American family.



Smits was born in Brooklyn in 1956. His mother, a former nurse, had come to New York from Puerto Rico several years earlier. His father, from the Dutch colony of Suriname in South America, emigrated at the same time. The family eventually included two sisters as well as young Jimmy. They moved around the city a lot, and spent three years in his mother's hometown of Ponce, Puerto Rico starting when Smits was nine. He remembers shining shoes in the plaza there for pocket money.

"That was a very traumatic time for me," he recalled, "because even though we spoke Spanish at home I wasn't fluent, and suddenly I had to go to school in this language." One teacher, though, was a strong positive influence as she took him under her wing and tutored him.

Perhaps it was experiences like these that influenced Smits' original decision to study education in college after graduating from Thomas Jefferson High School back in New York.

"I was an education major, Puerto Rican studies minor," he said. "Then my whole acting thing came out, and I was a theater major, Puerto Rican studies minor, but in the end I switched my minor to education for my parents. They wanted something for me to fall back on, in case the acting didn't work out." He laughed, then leaned forward seriously. "Because it was important to them, you know—I was the first one in the family to go to college, and they wanted me to succeed."

Smits' daughter Taina was born when he was just eighteen, and his son Joaquin was born eight years later.

Though an involved and clearly a proud parent, becoming a father just as he was starting college wasn't easy, and he took the responsibility seriously.

"It took me about five and a half years to finish my bachelor's degree," he remembered. "I'd take fewer credits, and I may have even not gone for a semester, because I'd be working." What kept him from dropping out? He smiled and shrugged. "We were poor. I wanted to get ahead. That's it."

After graduation he continued his education at Cornell University, where he received a master of fine arts degree in drama. For several years, his life followed the path of many actors, landing roles in off-Broadway productions and regional theater. He is especially proud of his work with the New York Shakespeare Festival. It was seeing fellow Puerto Rican Raul Julia performing Shakespeare in New York several years earlier that had convinced Smits he could become an actor.

"I thought to myself, damn, he made it, he's doing it; I can do it, too," he said. Miriam Colon and James Earl Jones were also named as important influences.

In 1985, soon after moving to California, Smits landed the role of Victor Sifuentes on the long-running television show, *L.A. Law*. He garnered six consecutive Emmy award nominations and won the award in 1990.

Throughout these years, Smits continued meeting people who had been helped by ASPIRA.

"During *L.A. Law*, I'd get invited by the National Hispanic Bar Association to their events, and I'd meet the president or other top lawyers and we'd start talking—'Yeah, I'm from New York, too, I went through ASPIRA.' I just meet people who say that all the time, and that kind of success needs to be acknowledged."

Smits is doing his part to help ASPIRA. In early November he took time out to serve as guest speaker at ASPIRA of Puerto Rico's 25th Anniversary Gala.

"Twenty-five years is a milestone," he said. "And I believe in the organization. Our youth are our future, and ASPIRA has continually supported young people year after year, and encouraged them to continue. It's a wonderful organization. Especially now, when funds are dwindling, when young people give up on college because it costs so much, we really need organizations like this and we all need to support them."

Smits sees that kind of community support for its own as a critical element in advancing all Latino issues.

"It's the same in my business as it is with ASPIRA," he said. "It's very hard for Latinos to succeed in Holly-

wood. We don't just need more of the hired help—the actors—we also need more Latino writers, producers, directors. We need to nurture them, and then the Latino public needs to support our own. We need to show our economic power as a united block."

According to Smits, ethnic and regional polarization in the Latino community is a stumbling block only beginning to be overcome.

"We have so much more in common with each other, we need to stop thinking of divisions between groups. We have our language, our belief in family, our spirituality—when we start acknowledging all that the divisions seem minimal. I talk to young people all the time, and they seem to have less of this bias."

What does he tell the youth he speaks to?

"Follow your dreams," he said immediately. "There's so much out there that can be negative, because of your economic situation, if you're disadvantaged, or because of your background or your ethnicity. These are all stoppages that you have to overcome. We need to be knocking on the door and trying to break it down, or at least get our foot in."

He leaned back in his chair. "The worst thing is to look back in ten years and say, 'I could have' or 'I should have.' Give it your best shot now; give it your all. You've got nothing to lose, and more times than not you can jump over the hurdles in your way. You've got to believe in yourself." He shrugged. "Of course, there's sacrifice, too, and there's always challenges, but don't settle for less."

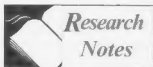
A perfectionist, Smits tries to follow his own advice in his acting. He resists the idea of choosing parts with an eye to being a role model, insisting that such thinking would hold him back from taking creative risks.

"Versatility is the key," he said. "More than my particular role being some kind of model, I'm very conscious of what the overall project is saying to people. In *Mi Familia* it didn't matter that my character had been in prison because the overall message was so important." He notes that this was a Latino project all around, from writers to directors to technicians, as well as the actors.

"*Mi Familia* was a very important project with a universal message, but it took six years to be financed. I want to be doing something about this problem. I want to be producing, creating, nurturing new talent."

"I'm very lucky; I love doing what I do now. But in the future I want to do more to help us as Latinos make faster strides."

Spoken like a true Aspirante.



Undergraduate Remedial Education

According to research of the American Council on Education, "Most of the students taking remedial courses attend public two-year colleges. Only one-third attend four-year institutions." The majority of students enrolled in these classes are freshmen. The report is based on data on undergraduates who took at least one remedial course during the 1992-93 school year.

Approximately 90 percent of all two-year colleges and 64 percent of all four-year institutions offered remedial instruction in the fall of 1989 (National Center for Education Statistics, 1991).

"More than two-thirds (69 percent) of those taking remedial math were white, while 15 percent were African American, 11 percent were Hispanic, 4 percent were Asian American, and 1 percent were American Indian." Moreover, "approximately 17 percent of all students at public two-year colleges said they took developmental courses, as did 11 percent of those at public four-year institutions. Only 8 percent of the undergraduates at independent four-year institutions reported receiving remedial help.

Among Hispanic undergraduates taking remedial courses in 1992-93, 81 percent took no remedial courses; 10 percent took remedial math, 10 percent remedial reading, 10 percent took remedial writing, and 5 percent took remedial study skills (NCES, NPSAS unpublished data, 1995).

According to the brief, remedial education is utilized by students of various characteristics. "Contrary to stereotypes, the majority of undergraduates taking developmental courses are white students whose primary language is English and who were born in the United States. However, all groups are not represented equally in remedial classes. For example, students taking developmental courses are more likely than those not receiving remedial help to earn less than \$20,000 annually, to have been outside the United States, to speak a language other than English at home, and to be people of color."

Judge Rules on Bilingual Education in New York

The State Supreme Court of New York dismissed a lawsuit that accused Richard P. Mills, the State Commissioner of Education, of violating the state's bilingual education law by maintaining students in the program over the current three year maximum threshold. The case, filed by a Brooklyn parents organization, alleged that thousands of immigrant children were forced to spend up to six years in bilingual education classes. The court found no legal basis for the claim.

The Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund (PRLDEF) pressed for dismissal of the suit. ASPIRA of New York moved for permission to intervene as respondents acknowledging that, by law, the Commissioner is authorized to extend the three year period in which children may participate in bilingual education if school authorities apply for this extension.

According to state law, students may stay in the bilingual program for more than three years if the appropriate school authorities believe it is necessary.

Mobilization for Equity Project

ASPIRA and the National Coalition of Advocates for Students (NCAS), comprised of sixty member organizations, have joined to train and organize large numbers of parents of public school children who are underrepresented in key education programs and services under a project entitled, Mobilization for Equity (MFE).

Targeting racial and language minority communities, the MFE project's agenda includes increased parent participation, reduced tracking and ability grouping, appropriate curriculum and teaching strategies, language rights, broad-based student assessment, prejudice free learning environments, vital student support services, and disproportionate discipline of disadvantaged students. Ten key students rights from the Good Common School, a report which ASPIRA helped NCAS to develop, serve as the organizing agenda.

MFE topics such as Bilingual Education, Title I, TRIO and others are discussed during training for students and parents at all ASPIRA Associates to enable them to become leaders in mobilization efforts in their local area.

Working in conjunction with the MFE project, the ASPIRA Public Policy Leadership Program (APPLP), and other ASPIRA programs assist in the recruitment of participants from the community and the facilitation of the students component of the project. The project is funded by the **Ford Foundation**.



Legislative Update

ASPIRA has continued to work closely with other national organizations to monitor federal budget plans proposed for 1996 (and the next seven years), and to educate members of the U.S. Congress about the impact proposed funding cuts to education programs will have on local communities. Similar battles to protect education programs from further funding reductions, or elimination, continue as Congress negotiates its no growth Fiscal Year 1997 Budget.

President Clinton signed into law a \$23.6 billion omnibus 1996 Budget bill (HR 3019) that includes \$100 million added during the last days of negotiations for key education programs. **Title I** was left at \$350 million, down \$21 million from fiscal year 1995. **Safe and Drug-Free Schools** received an extra \$66 million which brought the amount to level-funding (\$466 million). An earlier House proposal called for a cut of 59%. The final '96 bill also raised **School To Work** funding to \$350 million (it was \$245,000 in 1995). An earlier House plan proposed cutting the program by 22%. STW training provides an opportunity for high school students who may not be college bound to receive the training and skills they need to find meaningful employment. Funding for **Summer Youth Employment**, previously slated for elimination, was restored. The maximum **Pell Grant** (Title IV-A) was increased to \$2,470 (it was funded at \$2,340 in 1995). The House 1997 Appropriations bill proposes an increase of the maximum Pell Grant by \$30 to \$2,500. It also proposes to raise \$68 million for the **Work Study** program. It would also raise \$38 million for **TRIO** Programs for Disadvantaged Students (Title IV-A of the Higher Education Act) which remained at the 1995 funding level of \$463,000 this year. President Clinton proposed to increase TRIO funding to \$500,000 in his 1997 Budget Proposal to Congress.

Funding for **Goals 2000**, to reform our public schools, was threatened by a cut of \$400 million, but was later restored. However, the 1997 budget proposes to eliminate the program. The Senate restored \$10,000 for **Parental Assistance** which had been previously slated for elimination in the House. **Title I, Education for Disadvantaged Students** (\$1.3 billion) received a 17% cut, denying 1.1 million disadvantaged students remedial and language services.

Bilingual Education (Title VII) continues to be under attack and has not fared well in negotiations. The 1996 Labor-HHS-Education appropriations bill (which passed the House by a vote of 219 to 208), reduced spending for Bilingual Education from \$193 million to \$53 million and eliminated Title VII profes-

sional development, state grants and research, including: education regional assistance centers. In 1995, Bilingual Education and Minority Language Affairs programs were funded at \$206,700. Both the House and Senate proposed only \$150,000 in their 1996 budget proposals. President Clinton has requested an increase in Bilingual Education funding to \$261,700 in his 1997 Budget. However, the House Subcommittee's 1997 Appropriations Budget proposes to eliminate \$10.8 million in bilingual education funding, including \$9.7 million for professional development. Bilingual instruction, immigrant education and foreign language assistance would be funded at \$177.2 million.

Funding for **Hispanic Serving Institutions** was cut by 17% in the 1996 budget. These five-year development grants, which began in 1994, depend heavily on the level of appropriations received by the Education Department from Congress. Any cut will effect how HSI's are funded for the remaining years of the grant, thus, no new programs will be funded, and programs will be forced to reduce services.

English-Only bills to declare English the official language of the U.S. and/or repeal Bilingual Education and bilingual voting rights have been making their way through Congress (HR 739, HR 1005/ S. 356). During a House hearing, only one person was invited to speak in support of bilingual language rights. The Senate Governmental Affairs Committee is planning to hold a public hearing regarding S. 356.

An **anti-immigration bill** passed by the House (HR 2202) proposes to bar children of immigrants access to public education, while another measure in the Senate (S. 1664) would bar immigrants from receiving student aid. An amendment to exempt student aid from the bill was defeated.

National Service Program (including **AmeriCorps**) funding was eliminated in the VA/ HUD 1997 Appropriations Bill during debate on the House floor, despite attempts to restore this funding. The Senate restored the funds. Both Senate and House must now agree on a level of funding for the program.

ASPIRA National Office Has New Home

The ASPIRA National Office has moved to a new office after ten years in Washington, DC. "We are very happy with our new facilities, which provide the added space we needed for our rapid expansion," said Ronald Blackburn-Moreno, National Executive Director. It took over a year to find a space that was just right to project the image we want for the ASPIRA National Office," he added. The new address is:

ASPIRA Association
1444 I St., NW, Suite 800
Washington, DC 20005

Tele: (202) 835-3600 / Fax: (202) 835-3613 /
E-Mail: ASPIRA1@aol.com

ASPIRA Awarded Grants -- DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, Hitachi Foundation, EXXON Corporation, The Carnegie Corporation of New York and Others Support ASPIRA Programs

DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund With a new \$600,000 grant from the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund for three years, ASPIRA will significantly expand its efforts to build family/school partnerships and community-based leadership development. The APEX Program which has operated with great success in Pennsylvania and Chicago, will expand to ASPIRA of New York, Puerto Rico, Florida, and New Jersey over the next three years. APEX trains parents to promote better schools for their children and helps them mobilize other parents to support education reform. Over the first three years, APEX has graduated 400 parents who are continuing to act as advocates for their children. APEX materials and manuals have been developed and are being disseminated nationally to colleges, school districts, community-based organizations, and other organizations interested in starting family involvement programs. In addition, training is being offered to other national organizations seeking to establish new APEX sites. Workshop and Facilitator Manuals from the APEX curriculum are available in Spanish and English, and are being sold to various educational organizations and school boards across the country. In order to expand its collaborations, APEX has joined a number of partnerships: **The Learning Channel** is working with ASPIRA to train APEX Parents and ASPIRA/AmeriCorps Members about media literacy. ASPIRA was also a cosponsor of **National Community Education Day** on November 21. This year's theme for National Community Education Day was "Schools and Families: Partners Through Community Education." As a member of the **National Coalition of Parent Involvement in Education (NCPIE)**, ASPIRA works to promote family literacy and communication with schools. Anyone wishing to order manuals may call the ASPIRA National Office at (202) 835-3600 and ask to speak to APEX staff.

Hitachi Foundation awarded the ASPIRA National Offices two-year \$140,000 grant to develop and implement a program to increase corporate volunteerism. The project, being piloted in Bridgeport, Connecticut through ASPIRA of Connecticut, will include a Market Research Laboratory in which students will be matched with corporate employees to gain a better understanding of business and marketing. AmeriCorps members will provide training to corporate employees and student participants on the ethic of service, service-learning and community-based volunteering. An innovative aspect of the program is that it will work directly with corporations to reduce internal barriers and to promote volunteerism among employers.

The Carnegie Corporation of New York has awarded ASPIRA a \$300,000 grant to expand and institutionalize its comprehensive pre-college mathematics and science intervention program for middle school Latino students, the Mathematics and Science Academy (MAS). ASPIRA will continue to institutionalize the MAS program in Chicago, where it was successfully piloted in collaboration with ASPIRA of Illinois between 1991-94; and progressively expand the program to the ASPIRA Associates in New York, Miami, and Philadelphia over a two-year period. The MAS Academy will reach between 900-1,200 students and their parents.

The MAS program will improve the mathematics and science skills of Latino and other minority youth, with the aim of preparing them for the college-prep curriculum in high school, for postsecondary education, and eventually for rewarding professional careers. Hispanic professionals in the math and science disciplines will serve as role model resources in motivating, tutoring, encouraging and mentoring the student participants.

Exxon Corporation committed \$200,000 over the next two years in support of the Texas TOPS School Retention Partnership Program. The TOPS Program (Teachers, Organizations and Parents for Students) is designed to improve academic performance and reduce the dropout rate for Latino students. The Exxon grant will be used to support the TOPS program in three middle schools: Hogg Middle School, Houston; Taftalla Middle School, San Antonio and Cunningham Middle School, Corpus Christi. Each of these schools has successfully participated in the initial phase of the TOPS School Retention Program begun by ASPIRA in 1991.

Edward F. Ahlert, manager of contributions for Exxon, said: "We are encouraged by the work of ASPIRA's TOPS School Retention Partnership Program and are pleased that this grant will enable the organization to continue its work in Texas. We hope ASPIRA will develop a viable model through TOPS of a dropout intervention program for Latino students that other school districts can adapt."

The Exxon grant will enable the selected middle schools to continue their work with at-risk Latino students and develop a model that can be used throughout the United States. In addition to the grant, Exxon will provide employee volunteers to work with students at the Hogg Middle School under its Volunteer Involvement Program which last year fulfilled more than 5,400 volunteer opportunities to many Houston-area schools and nonprofit organizations. **The Houston Endowment, Inc., Sprint and the Traveler's Foundation** also contributed to the TOPS program.

Leaders Respond to Attacks on Hispanic Community

In January, shortly after President Clinton's State of the Union Address which called for greater unity, the National Hispanic Leadership Agenda (NHLA) held a press conference in Washington, D.C., to offer a unified response to attacks waged over the past year which negatively impact Hispanics in the areas of affirmative action, education, immigration, language rights, bilingual education, as well as efforts to dismantle [and weaken] important government programs and services. The NHLA, Chaired by ASPIRA, is a broadly based, nonprofit, nonpartisan coalition of distinguished leaders and thirty-two national Hispanic organizations who represent the diverse segments of the Latino community throughout the United States and Puerto Rico.

In the spirit of this Presidential address, the NHLA will take this challenge to call on our leaders in Congress and the Administration, in states and in local communities -- to help all families to stay together; help every American to achieve economic security.

Congressman Bill Richardson denounced plans that would cut back important federal programs and amount to the most drastic cuts in forty years. According to Raúl Yzaquiere, President of the National Council of La Raza, "the silver lining [of Proposition 187] is that it is a wake-up call to those people who

have become naturalized citizens, but had not registered to vote!" Mr. José Niño, President of the U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, defended affirmative action indicating that Corporate America had seen the benefits of a diverse workforce. This message was echoed by Ricardo Bela, the President of the Hispanic Association on Corporate Responsibility. Manuel Mirabal, President & CEO of the National Puerto Rican Coalition spoke on housing and economic development. Jake Alarid made the case for Hispanic veterans, whereas, Ada Peña, a spokesperson from LULAC, indicated that Hispanics need to mobilize during this election year. According to Al Zapanta, President of the U.S. Mexico Chamber of Commerce, "we must not, and will not, permit false perceptions about Hispanics to continue. Instead, we will go out and register new citizens. We will get them to register and then to vote in November!" he said.

In March, over 6,000 Puerto Ricans marched on Washington to state the position of the Puerto Rican community on key issues before Congress. **Puerto Rican Affirmation Day (Baricua First!)** demonstrated that *now the moment of great possibility opens before us to change the inequities in our schools.*

Pictured above L-R: NHLA representatives Lorena Gutierrez-Nestor (SHBA), Ronald Blackmun-Moreno (ASPIRA), Rick López NABE), Ricardo Bela (HACR), Laura Campos (MANA), Manuel Mirabal (NPRC), Raúl Yzaquiere (NCLR), Jake Alarid (GI Forum), José Niño (USPCC), Ricardo Martínez (HACU).



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